Authority Found the Indians' Proximity Intolerable

VICTORIA POLICE RAZED ENCAMPMENT

PAGES of the PAST

The stories in this continuing series are taken from the files of The British Colonist, forerunner of today's Victoria daily newspaper, the oldest on the Pacific coast and west of the Great Lakes. The paper was founded by a colorful Maritimer, Amor de Cosmos, born Smith. The quotations from the century-old editions shed light upon conditions and the impact of events in the early days in Victoria.

IN EUROPE the last Napoleon was grabbing new territories to the glory of France, and neighbor nations were indignant and apprehensive. Savoy had just become a part of his dominions, and the still-flourishing kingdom of Piedmont had seized Tuscany and the Romagna. Germany was afraid Napoleon might move towards the Rhine. Antwerp's burghers were nervous about French forces close to the frontier.

The London Times denounced such power politics, calling them acts of speculation, wrong in principle, the only defence against them being constant watchfulness and armed preparation. But as to doing something . . . well, the Big Powers were planning a conference in London; with the blessing of Russia.

But while the great nations were jockeying for position and influence in Europe, the townspeople of Victoria were doing a little territorial expanding themselves.

For some time Indians, from as far away as the Queen Charlottes, had been throwing up their bivouacs close to the borders of the town. They had offended citizens by their unorthodox behavior. They had caused considerable uneasiness because, when they drank the atrocious liquor the white men sold them, they went berserk. Sometimes they fought among themselves, sometimes they threatened white settlers.

Not only that, their tents and shanties were in the way of the colonial capital's expansion.

So the Legislative Assembly instructed that they should be removed.

Governor James Douglas himself gave the order.

On April 28, "a posse of policemen under Chief of Police Bailey proceeded to the Indian encampment" in the rear of Young's warehouse, on the northern outskirts, and tumbled the dwellings about the ears of their occupants.

For the most part, as The British Colonist reported, the Indians took these drastic measures in good part, "stating that as hy-as tyee Douglas had ordered their homes destroyed, it must be all right."

But all of them were not complaisant.

"One of the natives became enraged at seeing his habitation destroyed in such a summary manner and, opening a box, shook out a number of human scalps at one of the officers, as much as to say, 'I'll serve you the same way, old fellow, if I get a chance'."

The newspaper and the populace treated the matter with some levity. But the Indian who had the effrontery to object was later arrested for threatening a police officer and given two months on the chain gang.

For two days the work of demolition went forward until The British Colonist was able to report "There is no longer an Indian camp on the northern section of the city."

The Indians silently carried their goods away, set up their tents and lodges closer to Esquimalt.

WHILE THIS was going on in Victoria, white renegades cut the throats of two Chinese in the Yale country, presumably with the motive of robbery, for the dead men were said to be working a rich claim.

And in Romano's store, in Fort Yale, a trunk was looted of $3,500, in raw gold.

It was believed the notorious gun-fighter and bandit Harry Sprague was at the bottom of this crime. But a German, going by the name of Ross, was the number one suspect.

He had feigned drunkenness one night in the Romano store, so it was said, and the proprietor had allowed him to sleep on the floor. During the night Romano was chloroformed. And while unconscious, Ross was believed to have allowed his accomplices into the place. They removed the trunk with its treasure, smashed it open in the back yard of the place, and made off with all but $100 of the gold. How they missed the little bag of nuggets was not explained.

Ross, it seems, then went back into the store, relocked the doors and actually did fall asleep.

Romano awakened him, furiously, when he found his trunk missing next morning.

Meanwhile, a search of the town discovered Sprague and a henchman named Hazel in a cheap hotel. They were arrested along with Ross.

Ross, it was discovered, was the man who had been arrested in Victoria six weeks before when the Pidwell house had been raided by armed men, and when Francis Birney was overcome and trussed by the householder. He had been acquitted for lack of evidence.

The fact that gold was coming out of the creeks again in fair abundance was a lure the hard-case gunmen from "across the line" could not resist. There were many of them in the country. But the law, for the most part, discouraged them. They discovered the rule of the gun did not exist on British soil. Most of them slunk back to their earlier haunts before they ran headlong into trouble.

ST. GEORGE BELONGS TO APRIL

"Came fresh April full of lusty hed,
"And wanton as a kid whose hornes new bud."
—Spenser.

April was known to the Romans as the month of Venus, or Aphrodite, the Greek name for which was Aphrilis. It is truly a month of mixed weather, with some days extremely warm, while others are chilly, and showers are frequent. Farmers prefer the latter:

"A could April the barn will fill,
"And April showers make May flowers."

The first day of the month has a character all it own as April Fool's Day, when it is customary to play tricks on friends and neighbors, and is the delight of children everywhere. It was on this day in 1178 that a famous scientist, William Hare, was born — he discovered the circulatory system of the blood.

April 2, 1844, was a significant day in the social life of London, with the destruction of the old Debtors' Prison on Fleet Street. In this filthy and unsanitary building were incarcerated persons of all classes who were unable to pay their debts. The food was described as

"Peaspudding hot, peaspudding cold,
"Peaspudding in the pot nine days old."

Prisoners who had money, or friends to bring them food, did not fare too badly, but those who had not were obliged to eat the terrible fare provived, or starve.

In the year 1727, the state of affairs in the prison was investigated by Parliament, which after many years decided to have the building pulled down.

April 4, in the year 1774, saw the death of a famous writer, Oliver Goldsmith, whose works are still much enjoyed. A little over 100 years ago on the 16th of this month, the world-famous waxworks of Madame Tussaud was opened in London on Baker Street (which makes us think of Sherlock Holmes). The original proprietor had lived in France during the Revolution and seen many friends and relatives put to death on the guillotine. She herself had been sentenced to the same fate, but managed to escape to England, where she modelled prominent French figures of the Revolution. Soon her wax-works became famous. It is being constantly brought up to date by her descendants who still own the place.

April 18, 1802, was the day on which Erasmus Darwin, the famous scientist, died.

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APRIL IN THE COUNTRY is full of superstitions. This is the month when the cuckoo is first heard, and there are many legends surrounding the shy bird, who is not often seen. The popular belief is that as many times as an unmarried person hears his call, will be the number of years before he or she gets married. Many people, at the first sound of his call, stand upon grass to bring good luck, and if a husband hears "cuckoo" when he is alone, it is a sure sign that his wife is unfaithful.

April 23 is a day always celebrated in England, dedicated to the patron saint, "George of England" as he is called, but Sicily, Aragon, Valencia, and Genoa, Malta and Barcelona, have all adopted him as their guardian saints — "the perfect knight without stain." The popular legend about St. George slaying the dragon is considered allegorically as the 'triumph of good over evil.' So wonderful were the stories of his purity and bravery that he was loved and admired all over the world, and the English named after him their highest order of chivalry (the Order of St. George and the Garter). He was particularly popular in the middle ages, and is referred to often in Shakespeare's plays. In "Henry V" when the king was preparing to attack the French army, he cried to his men, "God for Harry, England and St. George!"

Two days after St. George's Day comes the dedication day of St. Mark, with the eve of which many curious legends are connected. In the north of England they say that if a parishoner watches in the church porch from 11 p.m. to 1 a.m. of the next day, he will see the apparitions of those about to die in the ensuing year and be buried in the churchyard. In earlier days, St. Mark's eve was celebrated much as Halloween is today.

A famous Englishman, Oliver Cromwell, was born on April 25, 1599.